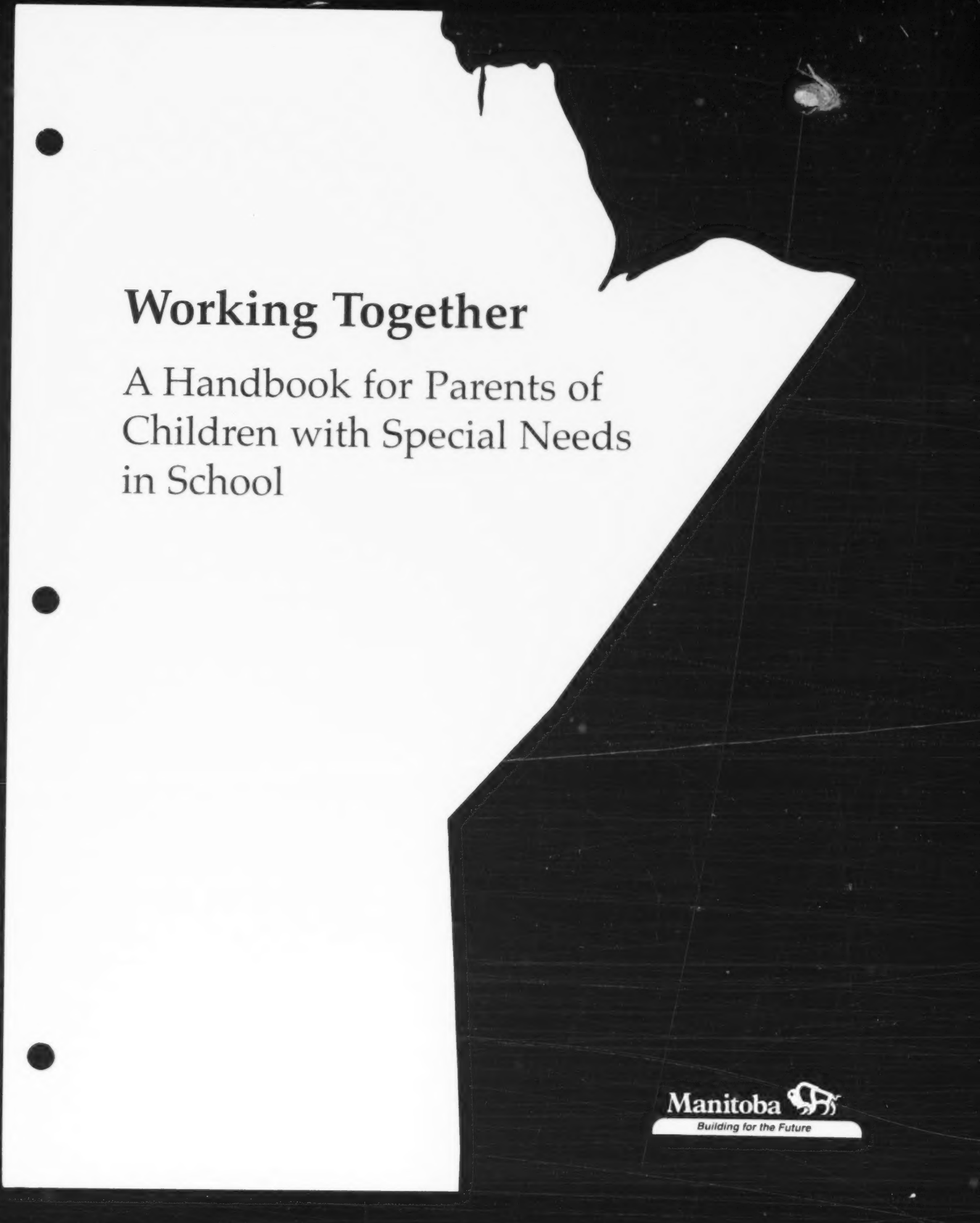
Working Together

A Handbook for Parents of Children with Special Needs in School



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WORKING TOGETHER

A Handbook for Parents of Children with Special Needs in School

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PREAMBLE

Parents, along with educators and Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, share a common goal:

> *Our goal is to ensure that children with special needs benefit from an educational experience that includes quality learning opportunities with expectations that consider each child's individual needs.*

In Manitoba, we are committed to the following philosophy of inclusion as our guiding principle:

> *Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued, and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the changing needs of its members. Through recognition and support, an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship.*
>
> *In Manitoba, we embrace inclusion as a means of enhancing the well-being of every member of the community. By working together, we strengthen our capacity to provide the foundation for a richer future for all of us.*

This philosophy of inclusion, adopted by the Department in 2001, is reflected in the development and content of Working Together: A Handbook for Parents of Children with Special Needs in School. Throughout the process of developing this handbook, Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth worked in partnership with the Student Services Administrators' Association of Manitoba and in consultation with parents across the province.

> "*In this resource, the term 'parents' refers to both parents and guardians and is used with the recognition that in some cases only one parent may be involved in a child's education.*"

This handbook emphasizes the diverse and changing learning needs of students with special needs. As well as offering support and encouragement to you as parents and families of students with special needs, this resource describes some of the services and activities that might be used to meet individual student needs at school. It also includes practical information and strategies for helping your child make successful transitions, for enhancing your role on your child's school team, and for staying informed.

Research tells us that children do better in school when their parents and families are involved in their education; this is especially important when a child has special needs. This parent handbook is designed to assist you throughout the years that your child attends school in Manitoba.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

Partnerships between Families and Schools

Working Together As Partners in Education

Parents are valued partners in education in Manitoba. As parents, you know your child best. You know your child's strengths, abilities, needs, and challenges, and, as a result, you have a vital role in the education of your child. It is important that you and your child participate in making decisions that affect your child's education. Your participation in planning for education and your ongoing involvement and support will make a positive and meaningful contribution to your child's education.

School boards in Manitoba are required to provide an education for all school-age children and youth who live in their school division. Children and youth have the right to attend school from age five to high school graduation or age 21. Students with special needs, including those with lifelong disabilities, require educational opportunities that are appropriate for their learning needs, age, and level of school achievement.

Developments in Special Education

Since 1966, schools in Manitoba have been responsible for the education of students with special needs. During this time, there have been many changes and improvements in the area of special education.

Significant developments have taken place in recent years:

- **Manitoba Special Education Review:** *A complete review of services for children and youth with special needs was undertaken in 1995.*
- **Special Education Review Initiative:** *This initiative was established in response to the recommendations in the Manitoba Special Education Review: Final Report (1998). The work of the initiative has included the development of support documents and a public consultation on proposed new policy, funding processes, and accountability measures.*
- **Bill 13—Appropriate Programming Legislation (2004):** *This legislation in The Public Schools Act establishes the framework for appropriate educational programming for all students.*

In Manitoba, we believe that a strong partnership between schools and families is the key to the success of our children and youth.

How to Use This Parent Handbook

Content and Organization

This handbook is intended for parents of children with special needs in school. It contains the following five main sections:

- **Introduction:** *The introductory section explains the background, content, and organization of this parent handbook. It includes definitions of words related to special education that are used throughout this resource.*
- **Identification and Assessment:** *This section outlines what is involved in identifying and assessing individual learning needs so that your child can make the most successful adjustment and progress in school.*
- **Planning and Programming:** *This section provides information about contacts and supports available in your school/division to assist in planning and developing effective educational programming for your child. It also suggests ways in which you can be involved in and contribute to your child's education.*
- **Communication:** *This section talks about the importance of ongoing communication between families and schools throughout a student's education and suggests ways in which questions and issues may be addressed.*
- **Additional Information:** *In this section you will find forms/lists that may help you in meeting your child's needs. The References page lists resources that were used in the development of this handbook.*

The tabbed divider pages for the five main sections within this handbook are meant to help you organize information. You are encouraged to keep the handbook in a three-ring binder and add other information relevant to your child's education.

Advice from Parents

Throughout this handbook you will notice words of advice provided by parents from across Manitoba who were involved in the development of this handbook.

Words You May Hear Used in School

Definitions of Commonly Used Words

Whether your child is entering the school system or is currently in school, you may hear teachers or other people working with your child use words such as those defined on the following pages. It is important that you ask teachers or others in your child's school about words they use and have them clarify what they mean in relation to your child.

> *"Ask for clarification. Jargon can be defined."*

Words Related to Special Education

Adaptation—changing the teaching process, the types of materials, and/or the assignments or products a student may produce to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

Assessment—the systematic process of gathering information about what a student knows, is able to do, and is learning to do.

Behaviour intervention plan (BIP)—an intervention plan developed by a team to meet a student's social and behavioural needs.

Clinician—a person who is certified as a school clinician under the Teaching Certificates and Qualifications Regulation (Manitoba Regulation 515/88) in *The Public Schools Act* and who provides support for special education services for school personnel, parents, and students.

Counselling and guidance services support—school personnel who provide support for activities that involve

- counselling students and parents
- evaluating students' abilities
- assisting students in personal, career, and social development
- providing referral assistance
- working with other staff members in planning and conducting guidance programs for students

Daily plan—a plan that outlines how a student's individual education plan (IEP) will be carried out each day. Usually it outlines a daily timetable for a student and the outcomes or goals to be worked on.

Differentiated instruction—a way of teaching that acknowledges and responds to the differences among students. Teachers use a wide range of teaching methods to support student learning and to help each student be as successful as possible.

Educational assistant—a person hired by the school/division to provide support for teachers or students. This person is supervised directly by a teacher or principal.

Inclusion—a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued, and safe.

Inclusive education—providing all students with the supports and opportunities they need to become participating members of their school community.

Individual education plan (IEP)—a yearly written plan developed and used by a team to meet the individual learning needs of a student.

Individualized programming—programming designed to meet the needs of students with severe cognitive disabilities who need programming outside the regular curriculum in the areas of cognitive, social/behavioural, self-help, motor, and communication skills.

(continued)

Legal guardian—court-appointed legal guardian or guardianship established through a provision of *The Child and Family Services Act* or *The Court of Queen's Bench Surrogate Practice Act*. The legal guardian of a child is usually the child's social worker working for an agency or authority linked with Child and Family Services.

Life skills programming—programming based on functional skills that all individuals need to live, work, and take care of themselves. It often focuses on skills needed for independent living.

Modification—changing the number or the content of the learning outcomes that a student is expected to meet in the provincial curriculum. The student's teacher or school team makes these changes.

Occupational therapist (OT) (clinician)—a professional trained to help people improve their ability to do activities related to their daily living, such as self-care, work, and leisure. The purpose of occupational therapy is to promote and maintain performance and health. An occupational therapist provides student-specific assessment, suggests student-specific adaptations and modifications to classroom equipment, and provides training of staff to help children participate as fully as possible in school programming and activities. Occupational therapists often work in conjunction with physiotherapists.

Physiotherapist (PT) (clinician)—a professional concerned with the assessment, maintenance, and improvement of physical function and performance of the body. Physiotherapists often work with students who have difficulties with movement, coordination, or balance. They provide student-specific assessment, recommendations, and staff training to meet a student's physical needs. Physiotherapists often work in conjunction with occupational therapists.

Placement—a school or a special learning environment chosen for a student. Placement may be determined by school/division policy or by a student's team.

Psychologist (clinician)—a school psychologist is a specialist in psychology and education. School psychologists are qualified mental health professionals in the areas of psychoeducational assessment, childhood development, behavioural management, individual/group counselling, and consultation.

Pupil file—a collection of written information about a student's education stored in a file in the school or school division office.

Reading clinician—a specially trained teacher who works with children whom the school has already identified as having learning problems. Reading clinicians provide assessment, make recommendations, and suggest modifications or adaptations in the areas of reading and writing, including suggestions on the most effective teaching strategies for children with reading difficulties.

Resource teacher—a teacher employed by a school/division to support students and educators through consultation, resources, and/or direct assistance. This person usually coordinates the student services within a school.

(continued)

Social worker (clinician)—a school social worker provides a link between home, school, and community. School social workers provide individual and group counselling, consultation to teachers, and other services that help students cope with their disabilities. They collaborate with community agencies and provide support for students and families requiring multiple services.

Speech-language pathologist (clinician)—a professional who supports the school team by providing specialized knowledge and skills in the area of communication development and difficulties and their impact on curriculum and social outcomes for students. A speech-language pathologist provides assessment, makes recommendations, provides therapy, and suggests modifications or adaptations in the area of communication.

Student services administrator—an individual with special education certification hired by the school division to coordinate and support the student services needs in schools.

Student services/special education services—staff and services provided by the school/division to meet the needs of students who have exceptional learning, social, behavioural, or physical needs.

Student-specific outcome—another term currently used for "goal(s)" in an individual education plan (IEP) for a student. The outcome or goal states what the student will learn, when this will be accomplished, and how the goal will be met.

Notes

IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT

Identifying and Planning for Your Child's Needs

If your child is entering school with special learning needs or if you and/or the classroom teacher find that your child is having difficulty learning, certain areas need to be considered to plan appropriately. To find out more about your child and how he or she learns, a teacher may look at the following areas:

- *social or behavioural skills*
- *communication skills*
- *cognitive/learning skills*
- *physical or sensory skills*

A doctor's diagnosis of a specific condition or disability does not provide enough information for planning for your child's individual needs. No two children are exactly alike. Children identified with the same diagnosis often have different abilities and learning needs, and require different supports. For example, two children could be diagnosed as having fetal alcohol syndrome, but each child could have very different learning needs. One child might function quite well in the classroom with the regular curriculum and need a little support to be successful, while the other child might have severe difficulties and need programming outside the curriculum as well as close supervision at all times.

First Steps in Getting Support

If you feel your child is having difficulty learning, the first step is to talk with the classroom teacher. To identify your child's learning needs, the teacher may

- *talk with your child*
- *observe your child during classroom activities*
- *analyze your child's class work*
- *assess your child's abilities in areas such as mathematics, reading, and so on*

As a parent, you can also gather information that may be useful in the assessment process. This information could include medical reports and observations you have made about your child's learning needs and recent behavioural changes outside of school.

> *"Share copies of your child's assessments and medical information with appropriate team members."*

After taking these steps in assessing a student's needs, the teacher, in consultation with the parents, may decide that a referral to a specialist for support or further assessment is necessary. Written parental consent is recommended before any referral to other teaching or clinical resources within the school/division is made. Each school/division has different assessment procedures, so talk to your child's teacher or the school principal about what kind of assessment or referral will take place and how long it will take.

Early identification and intervention for young children with special needs often leads to better school adjustment and performance. The assessment will help determine the child's individual needs. Some children may have difficulties learning at a particular time and may require short-term assistance. However, many special needs may be lifelong needs. Your child's needs may change, depending on the environment and the coping strategies he or she develops. Many other factors can affect a child's educational needs, and it is important that the school team meet regularly to identify and discuss these factors, and adjust the child's programming as needed.

Developing an Assessment Plan for Your Child

After you give consent to the school for referral of your child to a resource teacher or clinician, an assessment plan will be developed. Parents can be involved in the assessment process in various ways.

How an Assessment Is Carried Out

Depending on your child's needs, a number of specialists may be involved in the assessment plan. These specialists could include a resource teacher, reading clinician, speech-language pathologist, psychologist, occupational therapist, or others. Different professionals are qualified to assess different areas of your child's development. For example, a psychologist assesses a child's cognitive ability or potential. A classroom teacher or resource teacher can assess children's learning skills or how they learn. Talk to your child's classroom teacher about who will assess what.

A variety of assessment tools may be used to determine a child's learning/cognitive, social, emotional, communication, and/or behavioural development or needs. Some assessment tools include both parents and teachers to ensure that the information gathered accurately reflects the child.

An assessment may be done for the following reasons:

- *To find out whether your child has a special learning need.*
- *To identify your child's current capabilities, skills, and needs.*
- *To find out how those special learning needs affect your child's ability to learn and function in school.*
- *To identify appropriate programming and services that will meet your child's individual needs.*

Your child's development may be assessed in one area, or in various combinations of areas, depending on his or her specific needs.

> *"Bring a friend, neighbour, or relative with you to school meetings."*

When all the assessment results for your child are completed, the school will contact you and arrange a meeting with the staff who participated in the assessment to explain the results, discuss the recommendations, and involve you in making any related decisions. A written report may be shared with you, the teacher, and/or others working with your child.

If you are concerned about how long an assessment may take, discuss your concerns with your child's teacher or the school principal. The school works with the student services personnel to identify clinical services and supports required. The clinical staff assigned to a school will review the referrals they receive and prioritize their involvement according to need or urgency. Check with your child's teacher about the timeline for your child's assessment.

Notes

PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING

Planning Your Child's Programming

Learning: An Individual Process

All children can learn, but not all children learn in the same way, at the same time, or at the same rate. Learning is an individual process. Students with special needs have different learning needs, and there are many different ways of meeting those needs. What is right for one student may not be the best for another.

Meeting students' individual learning needs means

- *identifying current needs and skills*
- *choosing and developing individual outcomes or goals for a student*
- *choosing the best learning setting*
- *deciding on and planning for appropriate programming*

Planning Effective Programming

Effective programming is

- *based on an individual student's needs*
- *planned and active, continually adjusted as necessary to meet a student's needs*
- *inclusive, allowing students to participate in the regular curriculum to the fullest extent possible*
- *consistent across environments*
- *dependent upon parents and teachers working together*

Meeting Students' Programming Needs

Most students with special needs require some programming assistance to learn. This may involve changing the way a student is expected to learn, complete assignments, or participate in the classroom. To determine the type and extent of programming assistance needed, a team considers the student's abilities, strengths, and needs.

Types of Programming Assistance

In addition to differentiating instruction for all students, schools use adaptation, curricular modification, or individualized programming to support students. An explanation of these ways of meeting students' programming needs follows.

- **Differentiated Instruction:** *All teachers attempt to provide programming that responds to different learning needs among all students by differentiating their classroom teaching. Teachers will often vary their teaching methods or approaches when planning daily lessons, when working with students in the classroom, and when assessing student progress.*
- **Adaptation:** *When a student is capable of meeting the learning goals or outcomes of the Manitoba curriculum but needs physical accommodation or a different form of instruction or assessment, adaptations may be used. Adaptation means changing the teaching process, the types of materials, and/or the assignments or products a student may produce. For example, some students with physical disabilities cannot write and need a computer to do their written work. Students who are blind may need their learning materials to be available in Braille. These are adaptations.*
- **Curricular Modification:** *Some students with special needs may have significant cognitive learning difficulties that mean they cannot meet the Manitoba curriculum outcomes, even with adaptations. They need the curriculum to be modified. Modification means that the number or content of the Manitoba curriculum outcomes changes to meet a student's learning needs. It is important that a student's team discuss why and how the modifications are being made. Parents need to be informed and involved in the discussion. Modifications should be outlined in an IEP.*

  In the Senior Years (high school), when the school team determines that a student's courses will receive a Modified (M) designation, the student and parents must be included in this decision. Parents and students should be aware that M-designated courses do not meet entry requirements for post-secondary institutions and that they are reported on students' report cards.
- **Individualized Programming:** *Some students whose cognitive disabilities are so significant that they do not benefit from participating in the Manitoba curriculum need highly individualized, functionally appropriate learning goals. A team makes the decision to provide individualized programming based on a student's cognitive abilities. Individualized programming is based on planning in the areas of cognitive/functional academic skills, communication skills, social/behavioural skills, self-help or personal-management skills, and fine and grass motor skills. These student-specific outcomes or goals should be outlined in an IEP.*

  For older students, individualized programming often includes vocational planning. Senior Years students who receive an individualized programming designation (I) must have an IEP documenting the programming goals.

Talk to the classroom teacher about the type of programming assistance your child needs or is receiving. If your child is receiving adaptations, curricular modifications, or individualized programming and you would like more information, contact your child's classroom teacher or resource teacher.

> "*Have a good communication system.*
>
> *Make sure you know what's going on with your child at school.*"

Your Child's Team

> *"Find out if the local school has a parents' association for students with special needs. If it doesn't have one, start one. Contact community groups for assistance to get started."*

A team may be formed for a student who has learning needs that require support. The number of people involved on a team can vary. For students who have severe learning needs, a variety of support persons may be involved, including a resource teacher, an educational assistant, a psychologist, an occupational therapist, or others. The number of people on your child's team will depend on the needs of your child and the expertise needed to plan and develop a programming plan.

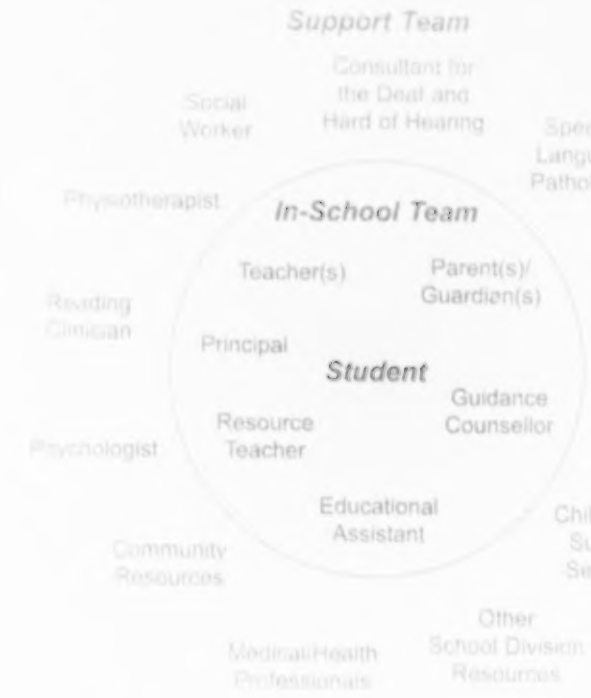
Team Members

The circle below identifies people who may be on your child's team.

- **In-School Team:** *This team usually consists of people who may be involved with a child at school on a daily basis.*
- **Support Team:** *The people on this team consult with the in-school team and provide expertise in the areas of planning, assessment, and programming.*

Adapted from Individual Education Planning: A Handbook for Developing and Implementing IEPs, Early to Senior Years (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education and Training, 1998), 3.5.

Your Child's Team



> "Keep in contact with your child's team.
>
> Make sure the school staff know you want to be part of your child's team and that you are there to help."

Contributing to Your Child's Team

As a parent, you play an important role in ensuring that your child has a successful educational experience. Being a strong advocate for your child includes being an informed, contributing member of your child's team.

You can actively support and participate in your child's school experiences in ways such as the following:

- *Participate in decisions that affect your child's education.*
- *Let the teacher(s) know when you respectfully disagree and ask to discuss issues as they arise.*
- *Give your informed, written consent for any needed assessments of your child.*
- *Be fully informed of school/division policies and practices.*
- *Share your preferences regarding your child's placement and be part of a discussion about options in your school/division.*
- *Obtain information on your child's learning and growth from teachers and others on your child's team.*
- *Review reports on your child's progress with the teacher at regular intervals throughout the school year.*
- *Participate in the development of your child's individual education plan (IEP).*

> "Have a book to introduce your child to the teacher. Include your child's likes/dislikes, photos, and so on."

When working as a team, all members participate in making decisions and share information with each other. As a parent, you may want to share

- *current medical information about your child*
- *successful learning and behaviour techniques that you are using at home*
- *changes in the home setting that might cause emotional reactions*
- *past school experiences*
- *ongoing goals for your child that you are supporting at home*

Sharing relevant information with your child's teacher can have a positive effect on your child's learning experience.

Getting to Know Your Child's School

One of the most important ways of building an effective team is to establish positive working relationships with your child's teachers and other school staff. You can make meaningful connections in a variety of ways:

> "When the school year starts, be prepared for things to change...things will need to be worked out."

- *Get to know the staff early in the school year and ensure there is ongoing communication.*
- *Drop by the school at the beginning or end of a day to introduce yourself.*
- *Call the school to find out the best time to have a brief conversation with the teacher.*
- *Welcome parent conferences as an important opportunity to exchange information and to work together.*
- *Get to know your school principal. Under The Public Schools Act, the principal is responsible for the school as a whole. He or she can be a source of information and is an important member of your child's team.*

Individual Education Planning

Individual education planning (IEP) is the process whereby teachers, support personnel, and parents work together as a team to meet the needs of individual students who require a range of supports. The team develops outcomes or goals based on a student's current needs and skills, and writes the plan for the school year in the student's IEP. The written plan is called an IEP.

Who Needs an IEP

All teachers are encouraged to consider the potential benefits of individual education planning for a wide range of students with very different needs. Most IEPs are written for students who need support for behavioural and learning or cognitive skills. An IEP will be developed when parents and staff together decide that this is the best way to meet a student's special needs. An IEP must be developed for a student who needs course modifications (M designation) or individualized programming (I designation).

Purpose of an IEP

The purpose of an IEP is to provide a plan to help a student meet individual outcomes or goals beyond his or her current skills. For this reason, an understanding of what a student can and cannot do is essential to the individual education planning process.

Each IEP is individual to the student for whom it is designed. As members of the IEP team, parents should be part of the individual planning process and sign the IEP for their child.

Components of an IEP

All IEPs, regardless of the individual needs of a student, contain certain essential components:

- *student identification and background information*
- *current levels of performance that reflect team consensus on the student's abilities and needs*
- *student-specific outcomes or goals*
- *performance objectives*
- *teaching methods, materials, and strategies*
- *the names of team members who will implement the IEP, and the setting(s) where it will be implemented*
- *plans and timelines for evaluation and review*

Stages of Developing an IEP

Developing an IEP involves the following four stages:

1. *gathering and sharing information*
2. *setting direction*
3. *developing and writing the IEP*
4. *implementing and reviewing the IEP*

These stages may occur in different sequences or may be worked on simultaneously, depending on the individual needs of the student. As parents and as members of your child's team, you can be actively involved in all stages of the IEP-development process.

- **Stage 1: Gathering and Sharing Information:** *You are a source of valuable information in the initial stages of developing and setting the direction of the IEP for your child. You can provide information about your child in areas such as the following:*
  - *aspirations and goals for your child*
  - *personality traits*
  - *interests, talents, and desires*
  - *strengths and needs*
  - *family and educational history that affects your child's present learning situation*
  - *current medical history and health care needs*
- **Stage 2: Setting Direction:** *Choosing priorities helps the team focus on what is most important for your child to learn each school year. At this stage, the team establishes these priorities based on all the information that has been gathered so far.*

  To determine priorities, the team needs to do the following:
  - *List your child's learning needs.*
  - *Rank your child's learning needs in order of importance.*
  - *Select your child's most important learning needs for the school year.*

  To determine your child's most important learning needs, the team needs to consider the following questions:
  - *Does your child need this skill now?*
  - *Will this skill be used for other learning?*
  - *Will this skill help your child be more independent?*
  - *Is the goal appropriate for your child's age and grade?*
  - *How long will it take to learn the skill?*
  - *How useful will the skill be for your child in other environments?*

- **Stage 3: Developing and Writing the IEP:** *As part of your child's team, you can offer ideas and information for the development of student-specific outcomes. These outcomes or goals usually indicate what the student might accomplish in a specific area in a determined amount of time during the school year. They are often written according to subject areas (e.g., language arts, mathematics) or planning domains (e.g., communication, self-help, functional, academic, social, behavioural, fine and gross motor skills).*

- **Stage 4: Implementing and Reviewing the IEP:** *At this stage of the IEP-development process, the team members review the student-specific outcomes and decide how they will know when the student has met the goals. Teaching and assessment strategies are put into practice. At this time the team reviews the content of the IEP in relation to the student's timetable (either classroom or individual) to make sure that the IEP is being carried out daily.*

The team will decide how often it is necessary to meet throughout the school year. During review meetings, your child's progress within the IEP is discussed, and possible changes to the plan are considered. It is important for you to attend these meetings so that you can discuss your child's progress and be part of the planning for next steps. At least once a year, usually in the late spring, the team will review the IEP and plan for the following school year. An IEP is written for the next school year using the information gathered from the current school year.

Promoting Successful IEPs

The IEPs that are most effective in promoting student learning

- *involve parents as active and equal team members in planning and implementation*
- *are working documents, linked to daily planning and activities*
- *identify clearly who is responsible for teaching a student on a daily basis and for gathering information about progress*
- *are "living" documents, changed to reflect a student's circumstances and progress*
- *link clinician and consultant reports and recommendations to daily programming*

For More Information...

For more information about Individual Education Planning, see <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/specedu/iep/index.html>.

Programming Supports

> "Seek to understand how services will be delivered."

An appropriate placement or learning environment should be chosen on an individual basis for a student with special needs. Educating students with special needs in regular classrooms in local schools is the first placement option considered by schools/divisions, in consultation with parents and students.

Most students with special needs attend their neighbourhood or local schools, and are provided with programming, supports, and services to meet their individual needs. However, when a team decides that a student's needs and IEP cannot be met in a regular classroom even with supports and services, alternatives to programming in the regular classroom are considered for part or all of the school day.

Placement Options

Schools/divisions in Manitoba offer a wide range of placement and learning options. Students may attend school

- *in their neighbourhood school in a classroom with their peers for the majority of the day*
- *in their neighbourhood school in a classroom with their peers and a special learning environment for part of the day*
- *in their neighbourhood school in a special learning environment for the majority of the day*
- *in a special learning environment that may not be in their neighbourhood school*

Supports within these environments could include

- *resource teacher*
- *clinician(s)*
- *educational assistant(s)*
- *specialized teacher*
- *consultant(s)*

Determining the appropriate placement for a student with special needs is a shared responsibility:

- **The Team:** *Parents have specific views on what would be the most enabling placement or learning environment for their child. Parents should communicate with school/division staff to become aware of options available locally. A student's team takes a number of factors into consideration in determining the most appropriate placement or learning environment for the student. These factors include the particular needs of the student, available resources and supports, the views of the student's parents, and what is appropriate and reasonable under the circumstances.*

- **The School and School Division:** *The school needs to identify any additional resources required to support the student-specific plan. School divisions allocate resources to schools. It is the responsibility of each school division to identify students with special needs, assess each student's strengths and needs, and, within resources available, plan and deliver educational programming that will best meet the needs of all students. Schools/divisions, in keeping with available resources and policy, are ultimately responsible for making placement decisions that are in the best interest of individual students and of all the students they serve.*

If you have questions regarding programming or supports for your child, or if you wish to have information regarding funding, contact your child's classroom teacher, school principal, or school division office.

Clinical and Specialist Support

At times, the school team may work together with other support people to meet your child's needs. The teacher may discuss with you the need for additional programming support to help determine and meet your child's needs.

> "*Seek to understand the role of each educator or professional who will be involved in your child's educational life.*"

Schools/divisions hire or contract clinicians to provide support in schools. Most school divisions have psychologists, social workers, and speech-language pathologists on their student services team. In addition, some hire or contract reading clinicians, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, health professionals, consultants, and others, depending upon their resources and local needs. Each support person can provide the team with information and services to help identify a student's needs, skills, learning style(s), physical needs, adaptations, or programming strategies. If a clinician is to be involved, the student's parents should be included in the referral process. For definitions of each clinician, please see the Introduction to this handbook.

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth provides schools/divisions with support for students who are Deaf/hard of hearing or blind/visually impaired. In addition, schools/divisions across the province can access the support of the Department's Special Education Consultants in a variety of areas.

A team for a student with special needs may also access the support of community service providers and specialist agencies. The Services for Persons with Disabilities Division of Family Services and Housing is one of the common supports used by families who have children with special needs.

Educational Assistants

When the school team is planning or carrying out the IEP for a student, it may be decided that the support of an educational assistant is necessary. You may hear many terms used to identify the assistant, such as teaching assistant, paraprofessional, and so on, but the accepted term in Manitoba is educational assistant.

Educational assistants provide supportive and complementary services to enhance the learning experiences of students, particularly those with special needs. They receive directions from teachers or the school principal.

Educational assistants may be asked to take on the following roles and responsibilities:

- *Carry out the daily implementation of the student-specific IEP outcomes or goals, as directed by the teacher.*
- *Reinforce a concept or skill that the teacher has taught with a small group of students.*
- *Provide personal care in areas such as personal hygiene, dressing, or helping a child use adaptive equipment (such as computer technology).*
- *Help prepare materials for an individual student, classroom, or school.*
- *Provide the teacher with information and/or written documentation about a student's performance, behaviour, growth, and needs.*

The amount of time an educational assistant is assigned to a classroom, a resource program, a group of students, or a particular student varies. Teachers are ultimately responsible for planning, implementing, and assessing student progress.

Schools/divisions hire or contract educational assistants and have hiring, qualification, and assignment policies. Please contact your school principal or school division office for more information.

Planning for Transitions

Transitions are a normal part of life and occur at different times throughout our lives. For children and youth, transitions occur at various times during their education. Transitions occur when students

- *enter the school system*
- *move between activities and settings*
- *move from grade to grade*
- *move from Early Years (Kindergarten to Grade 4) to Middle Years (Grade 5 to Grade 8)*

- *move from Middle Years to high school or Senior Years (Senior 1 to Senior 4)*
- *prepare for adult life*

Starting school, changing grades, changing schools, and moving to a new setting after completing school are common transitions for everyone. Getting used to a new classroom or school, new classmates, a new teacher, a new bus, or a different educational assistant can be difficult for many students.

Children and youth with special needs frequently experience difficulty in making transitions. The new situations they face because of life changes such as entering or leaving school require planning. When teams are meeting it is important that they discuss and plan for any issue related to students' current or upcoming transitions.

Early Childhood Transition to School

Entering the school system is an important event in a young child's life. Much of a child's future success in school depends upon his or her transition into school and upon having successful experiences in the early grades. For many children with special needs it is necessary to consider programming requirements and physical modifications to the school and/or classroom (e.g., ramps, special equipment) before they begin school.

To help parents and schools in planning for children's transition to school, Healthy Child Manitoba has prepared Guidelines for Early Childhood Transition to School for Children with Special Needs. This protocol promotes information sharing and collaborative planning between community-based agencies working with preschool children with special needs and the school system (one year) prior to the children's enrollment in school.

Many schools/divisions meet regularly with agencies providing services for children with special needs to discuss school transition planning. In addition, many use transition-planning processes to help make the beginning of school successful for students.

If your child is starting school, there are some important things for you to know and do. The following checklist may help you in planning for this important transition in your child's life.

Checklist

Plan Ahead

- ❑ When planning for your child's entry to school, ask yourself some questions.
  - What is your vision for your child's educational experience?
  - Is there information about your child that would be helpful for the school to know?
  - Does your child have specific programming needs?
  - Are there placement choices that you want for your child?
- ❑ Taking into consideration your child's needs, explore local resources and practices.
  - What services are available in your school division? In your neighbourhood school?
  - What are your school/division policies on inclusion, placement, transportation, programming, student services, or special education?

Inform the School

- ❑ At least a year before your child starts school, contact your child's local school to let staff know when your child will be coming. Ask to have a meeting to begin planning.
- ❑ If you are not sure about where your child should attend school, contact your school division.
- ❑ If your child is currently receiving services from a preschool program or service, ask that a meeting to support your child's entry to school be organized between the preschool agency and the school.

Work Together

- ❑ Once your child is registered in school, arrange a meeting with the classroom teacher, resource teacher, and relevant preschool service providers to discuss your child's educational programming. If there are specific plans for programming, equipment, or services, ask for a written plan that outlines what will be done, by whom, and when.
- ❑ You may wish to include preschool service providers in discussion with school staff to identify the supports and services most beneficial to enhancing your child's strengths and addressing your child's needs.
- ❑ Discuss the programming or training needs of the school staff who will work with your child. Ask what supports will be available to the school.
- ❑ Provide the school with copies of reports that may assist them in making programming decisions for your child.
- ❑ Let the teacher know that you want to participate in the planning meetings. Discuss how that will work.

Transition Planning for Students Reaching Age 16

As students get older and prepare to enter the Senior Years (high school), there is a need to identify what their hopes and dreams are for the future, and to begin to plan for the next phase in their life after school. This is a time for families to discuss and outline realistic plans for the future, taking into consideration the child's and parents' preferences for living and work options, training or educational opportunities, and recreational needs.

Transition planning often begins at school because that is where students spend the day and have individuals or a team of people who know them. To work towards a successful and smooth transition to adult life, planning needs to expand to include other parts of students' lives.

This is a time for the student, parents, and school team to begin the following steps in transition planning:

- *Identify the student's strengths, abilities, skills, interests, and needs.*
- *Identify programs that may be available to address the student's individual needs.*
- *Explore the availability of and requirements for*
  - *post-secondary education, vocational training, and employment (including supportive work options)*
  - *independent or supported living options*
  - *leisure or social opportunities*
- *Develop a person-centred plan for leaving school, based on the student's individual needs and desires.*

In Manitoba, transition planning for students with special needs should begin by at least age 16. Students, parents, the school, support services workers, and others develop a written plan that outlines roles and responsibilities, timelines, and actions to be taken before students leave high school. The guidelines are outlined in Manitoba Transition Planning Process Support Guidelines for Students with Special Needs Reaching Age 16.

Students with special needs require more intensive and coordinated planning than most high school students to enable them to make a successful transition when leaving school. The following checklist may help you and your child plan for important transitions in your child's life.

Checklist

Communicate

- ❑ Ask for a meeting with your child's team to begin transition planning.
- ❑ At this meeting, discuss the supports currently in place for your child and some of the new or adult-focused supports that will be needed.

Plan Ahead and Work Together

- ❑ In planning during this stage of your child's life, begin with a clear understanding of
  - who your child is and where he or she wants to be
  - what supports and services are available or need to be available
  - what actions need to be taken to achieve the transition plan
- ❑ Ask yourself some questions.
  - What are your child's strengths and needs?
  - What do you see your child doing in four or five years?
  - Where does your child see himself or herself?
  - Do you and your child have enough information to make decisions?
  - Do you need to investigate what opportunities or options are available?
  - Are there some specific skills your child needs to focus on to be as independent as possible?
- ❑ Talk to your child's teacher or other family or community support workers to assist you in the transition process.
- ❑ Gather information from various sources, such as the following:
  - Children's Special Services
  - The Society for Manitobans with Disabilities (SMD)
  - Supported Living Programs
  - Vocational Rehabilitation Services
  - Employment and Income Assistance
  - Office of the Vulnerable Persons' Commissioner
  - Regional Health Authority
    - Mental Health
    - Home Care

For More Information...

To find out more about the Healthy Child Manitoba protocols, talk to your child's classroom teacher or resource teacher or visit the Department's Special Education website: <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/specedu/protocols/index.html>.

COMMUNICATION

> *Communicate regularly with your child's teacher.*
>
> *Network with other parents, social workers, and so on.*

As a parent of a child with special needs, you will have to make a variety of decisions throughout your child's education. The issues that may affect your child are as many and diverse as there are children.

Research tells us that both parents and teachers feel ongoing communication is vital to the success of a child's education. While no one would question the need for parent involvement, almost everyone would have a different definition of the nature of this involvement. Clearly, a strong parent-teacher relationship needs trust, mutual respect, open communication, active listening, flexibility, and shared responsibility.

Asking Questions

During your child's years in school, issues may arise regarding your child's education or programming plan, learning needs or styles, assessment, learning supports, school attendance, social or behavioural expectations, and so on. Whether you are planning to meet with your child's classroom teacher, the school team, or others working with your child, it is important to prepare for the meeting. The following questions are examples of what you may wish to ask when discussing your child's progress or other issues of concern.

> *Check out the policies and practices in your school and school division.*
>
> *Ask what the policy is regarding school hours, school days, and end-of-June exam time.*

Questions to Ask

1. Is my child working at or meeting the grade level outcomes? If not, why not? What would be the best way to proceed?
2. Is my child meeting the outcomes outlined in his or her individual education plan (IEP)? If not, why not? What would support my child's learning?
3. What do the scores or marks mean?
4. Is my child receiving adaptations or modifications to his or her work?
5. Does my child have major strengths or weaknesses in specific subject areas that I don't know about?
6. How would you describe my child's learning style?
7. What supports does my child need to learn? What strategies have worked well for my child?
8. Is it necessary for my child to go out of the classroom for resource help for periods of time? Why?
9. Has my child completed class assignments?
10. Has my child been attending classes regularly?
11. Are there any potential social issues with peers that I need to be aware of?
12. Does my child need a referral to the school resource teacher, speech-language pathologist, psychologist, reading clinician, or guidance counsellor? What would be involved with the referral and how would that affect my child's programming?
13. What is the educational assistant's role with my child? How do I communicate with the educational assistant?
14. What can I/we do at home to support my/our child's learning?

Resolving Differences

> *"When strong emotions are aroused, it is easy for misunderstandings to occur.*
>
> *Don't be afraid to ask questions.*
>
> *Be open and honest. Use humour—it helps.*
>
> *Challenge"*

When you have questions or concerns about your child's programming, it is important that you address the issues with those who are involved. Try to resolve issues at the local school level:

- *Contact your child's classroom teacher first. Share your concerns with the teacher or ask questions to find out more about the issues.*
- *Include the important members of the school team.*
  - *Speak to the school guidance counsellor or resource teacher about issues that may include them.*
  - *Bring issues to the attention of the school principal, as required.*

If the issues cannot be resolved at school, you may wish to contact the student services administrator or superintendent at the school division office.

Disagreement or misunderstanding between families and schools is a natural and inevitable part of a system that strives to be inclusive. The existence of issues between parents and schools is neither good nor bad. When solutions are sought in a fair and respectful way, it is often possible to resolve disagreements in a positive manner.

There are, however, many possible approaches to resolving disagreements. Everyone benefits when issues are resolved locally. Children with special needs benefit from an education that addresses their learning needs. Parents and educators benefit from a strengthened working relationship and a better understanding of others' interests and needs.

For More Information...

See "Suggested Communication Contact List" in the Additional Information section of this handbook.

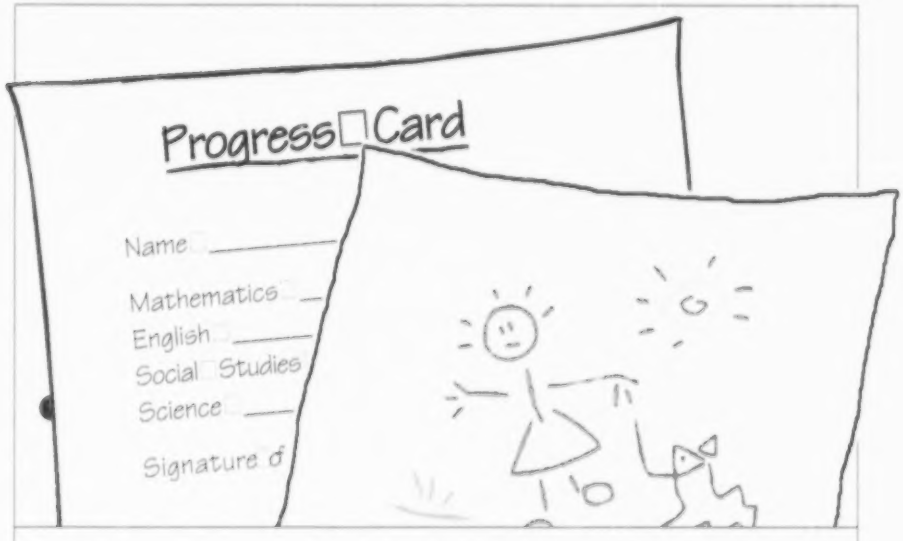
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In this section you will find several resources that are meant to assist you in meeting your child's needs:

- **My Child's Team:** *You may want to make a copy of this form at the beginning of each school year and use it to identify local resources you can call upon for support when addressing your child's needs.*
- **Suggested Communication Contact List:** *This chart identifies the people you may wish to contact when you have questions or concerns in specific areas.*

You are encouraged to keep this handbook in a three-ring binder and add other information relevant to your child's education. You may wish to include a pocket folder at the back of this handbook to keep important information about your child's learning.

> *"Add a pocket folder to this handbook where you can keep information about your child's education in one place (IEP, meeting notes, assessment reports)."*



Notes

My Child's Team			
School			
Resource Person	**Name**	**Telephone Number**	**Email Address**
Classroom Teacher			
Resource Teacher			
Principal			
School Division			
Student Services Administrator			
Psychologist			
Speech-Language Pathologist			
Occupational Therapist			
Physiotherapist			
Superintendent			
Other(s)			
Agencies/Services			

Copy this form and make a list of the local resources you may wish to contact during the school year about your child's needs.

Suggested Communication Contact List

If You Have Questions About... ...You May Want to Contact →	Office Secretary	Classroom Teachers	Resource Teacher	School Counsellor	Principal or Vice-Principal	Clinicians	Student Services Administrator	Superintendent	Trustee	Other
Absences	■	■			x					
Academic credit requirements/ graduation requirements				■	x					
Assessment		■	x		x		x			
Behaviour issues		■		x		x				
Bullying/Safe Schools/ Code of Conduct		■	x		x		x			
Calendar of events	■				x					
Changing class schedule				■						
Classroom issues		■			x					
Clinical supports		■	■		x	x	x			
Communication protocol		■	x		■		x	x		
Counselling, academic		x		x						
Counselling, personal				■		■				
Curriculum		■			x					
Discipline/detention		■			■					
Dispute resolution		■			■		x	x		
Drop-out prevention				x	x			x		
Educational assistant supports		■	■		■		x			
Emergency response information		■			x			x		x
Examinations (regular tests)		■								
Examinations (semester)		■		x	x					
Extracurricular activities		■			x					
Field trips		■			x					
Grading guidelines		■			x					
Health care		■	■		x		x			
Individual education plan (IEP)		■	■		x		x			
Parent Councils/Advisory Councils for School Leadership (ACSL)					■					
Parent-teacher conferences		■	x		■			x		
Provincial testing		■			x					
Report cards		■			x					
Retention		■		x	x					
School board policy								■	■	
School/division policy		x			x		x	x		
Schools of Choice					■					
Special Needs Funding			■		x		■			
Specialized programming/ placement		x	■		x		■			
Transition plan			■	x			x			
Transportation			■				x			

■ Means first contact(s)

x Means other contact(s)

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Notes

Feedback Form

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth welcomes your response to the enclosed document and invites you to complete and return this feedback form.

Document Title: *Working Together: A Handbook for Parents of Children with Special Needs in School*

Document Type: Parent Handbook

1. Please indicate your role in the learning community.

☐ Parent ☐ Teacher ☐ Resource Teacher ☐ School Administrator ☐ Counsellor

☐ School Trustee ☐ Division/District/Education Authority Administrator

☐ Other: _____

2. Please indicate which format(s) of the document you used.

☐ Print Copy ☐ Online Posting ☐ Both Formats

3. Please respond to each of the following statements by circling the applicable number.

The document content is	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. appropriate for its intended purpose	1	2	3	4
b. suitable for a variety of learning styles (e.g., visuals, graphics)	1	2	3	4
c. clear and well organized	1	2	3	4

Comments: _____

_____

4. How effectively does this document address the needs of your learning community or organization? Please explain.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

.../2

Document Title: *Working Together: A Handbook for Parents of Children with Special Needs in School*

5. Explain which aspect(s) of the resource you found to be

   a. most useful: _____

   _____

   _____

   b. least useful: _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

6. Additional comments: _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

7. May we contact you for further information? ☐ Yes ☐ No

   If yes, please provide the following:

   Name: _____

   School: _____

   Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Thank you for taking the time to provide valuable feedback.

Please return the completed feedback form to:

Carol-Anne Browning
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Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth
206 - 1181 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3G 0T3
Fax: 204-945-7914

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